

# Silence of the Idols: Appropriating the Myth of Sisyphus for Posthumanist Discourses

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**Abstract:** Both current and past analyses and critiques of transhumanist and posthumanist theories have had a propensity to cite the Greek myth of Prometheus as a paradigmatic figure. Although stark differences exist amongst the token forms of posthumanist theories and transhumanism, both theoretical domains claim promethean theory as their own. There are numerous definitions of those two concepts: therefore, this article focuses on posthumanism thought. By first analyzing the appropriation of the myth in posthumanism, we show how the myth fails to be foundational and how we need to rethink the posthumanist mythological framework. We then introduce Haldane's Daedalus figure as a fruitful analogy to understand the demiurgic posture that critics mean to unveil by first using Prometheus. Daedalus embodies the artisan role, whose status as an inventor for the mighty preserves from the gods' direct opprobrium. Thereafter, we introduce the Camusian Myth of Sisyphus as a competing analogy that ultimately serves as a myth better suited to address the posthumanist position on an existential standpoint. We ultimately show that Sisyphus, as the 'absurd man' that Camus claims him to be, is himself the posthuman, thus serving as a more ideal foundational myth for posthumanism and preserving the importance of narrative in posthuman discourses. To conclude, we specifically show that the concept of Sisyphus as a posthuman icon has significance that reaches beyond narrative value to current ecological debates in posthumanism.

**Keywords:** *Prometheus, Daedalus, Sisyphus, posthumanism, transhumanism, myths.*

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## 1. Introduction

Discussions of both transhumanism and posthumanism are populated with references to the classical Greek promethean myth most commonly referenced from the play *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus (5th/6th century B.C.E). The myth is appropriated by both early posthumanists (Ferrando, 2013; Franssen, 2014; Hassan, 1977; Herbrechter, 2013; Welsch, 2017) and transhumanists (Bostrom, 2005; Fuller, 2013) alike in order to represent their respective positions. Posthumanists, most specifically Ihab Hassan, use the myth to signal the radical change of the concept of human as we begin to redefine agency beyond conventional humanist dichotomies<sup>1</sup> (Franssen, 2014). When Prometheus is meant as an optimistic figure, he is an example of the ideal human agent, one who takes control of his being in order to rise beyond innate boundaries and better themselves with the ultimate move towards the supreme goal of the post-human. Transhumanist writer Gregory Stock exemplifies this by drawing from the Promethean myth in his book *Redesigning Humans* to support the claim of the inevitability that humans will “seize control of our evolutionary future” and that Prometheus’s theft of fire from the gods was “too characteristically human” (Stock, 2002: 3). Both theories use the myth, but in very different ways.

In this paper, we argue that the myth of Prometheus, although an integral part of the genealogy of posthumanism, is no longer an appropriate analogy. In order to successfully accomplish this, we lay out the promethean myth as well as discuss its past and contemporary uses in both in the various posthumanist and transhumanist discourses. In doing this we will show some of the insufficiencies of the myth as it has historically been used in posthumanist circles. Finally, and most importantly, we will argue that Haldane’s *Daedalus or, Science and the Future* (1923) successfully provide a creator mythology, and the Camusian Myth of Sisyphus (1942) provides an existential narrative for posthumanist theorists who wish to move beyond the bounds of the innate humanist dichotomies found in the promethean myth (most specifically those of god/man and heaven/earth) as well as briefly show how those myths can be applied to the current ecological debates in posthumanist discourses.

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<sup>1</sup> To better understand the origin and potency of what constitutes ‘humanist/anthropocentric dichotomies’ (frequently referred to in this text) we recommend refereeing to both Deleuze and Guattari (1988) and Sorgner (2014).

## 2. Myth as Narrative

### 2.1 *Prometheus Unbound*

Accounted by Aeschylus as the only titan to be spared damnation after the fabled Clash of the Titans, Zeus deemed Prometheus worthy of mercy given his critical role in helping the Olympian gods win the war against their forebears. After ascension to the Olympian throne, Zeus, whom Prometheus aided in winning the war, became determined to destroy the entire human race. Abhorred by the tyrant's decision, Prometheus felt pity on the humans and determined to help them, stole the secret of fire from Olympus and brought it down to humans. He became their mentor, helping them transcend their ignorance by giving them the wisdom and tools by which they can better themselves. Angered upon discovering his deception, Zeus punished Prometheus to everlasting torment. Tied to a pillar, he was doomed to have his liver eaten by an eagle and having it regrow every day so that it may be eaten again.

Different versions of the myth exist, one version coming from Plato's Protagoras (380 BCE) as well as Hesiod (8th Century) (Hesiod, 1959; Plato, 1997). Although these versions recount the unfolding of Zeus' anger against humanity differently, they are common in that ultimately Prometheus enlightens humans with his gifts and is consequentially charged with theft by the gods. The Platonic version however provides perhaps the most relevant narrative for human privilege in the world and among nonhumans. Plato's narrative of Prometheus is one in which he gifts the sidelined humanity with the stolen gifts of fire, wisdom and other qualities of a divine nature that made them superior to other lifeforms (Plato, 1997: 757). Although in the beginning they were weaker [i.e., incomplete] "in every way" to other beasts, it was only after Zeus' intervention in which he gifted humanity with other qualities, they were able to better collectively order themselves (Plato, 1997: 757). We can already begin to see how the Platonic version predisposes transhumanism and posthumanism to its adoption, as Prometheus is the entity bestowing the 'incomplete' humans.

### 2.2 *Promethean Posthumanism*

In his 1977 paper *Prometheus as performer: Toward a posthumanist culture?* Ihab Hassan draws from the example of Prometheus as the spark that initiated posthumanism saying that Hassan argues that

*Posthumanist culture is a performance in progress, and their symbolic nexus is Prometheus. Prometheus is himself the figure of a flawed consciousness*

*struggling to transcend such divisions as the One and the Many, Cosmos and Culture, the Universal and the Concrete; with regard to posthumanism itself, the most relevant aspect of the Promethean dialectic concerns Imagination and Science, Myth and Technology, Earth and Sky, two realms tending to one* (Hassan, 1977: 838).

Hassan argues that Prometheus is the key to posthumanism because he transcends the boundaries of human definitions. He both makes humans and changes them beyond any definable dichotomies that are crucial to humanist thought, thus pushing beyond the boundaries of the “five hundred years of humanism” that is ultimately “coming to an end” (Hassan, 1977: 843).

The dichotomies that are characteristic of enlightenment humanist thought, although changing over time, include such distinctions as mind/body, rational/irrational, human/nonhuman, object/subject, and of course the anthropocentric superiority of humankind (Wolfe, 2009). Hassan argues that it is these modes of being that will ultimately dissolve as the arts and sciences blur distinctions and become integrated into the fabric of being. Ultimately, the posthumanism project seeks to move beyond the conventional binaries that characterize humanist thought (Hassan, 1977; Wolfe, 2009). They draw upon the myth of Prometheus as a means to base this form of theoretical rebellion on, as Prometheus himself, breaking his masters’ laws, seeks to bring the means and wisdom by which he can help beings to transcend and redefine themselves into something foreign and previously unknowable.

However, early conceptions of the promethean narrative and its application to posthumanism does not account its evolution. It is the aim of the remainder of this paper to show how Prometheus should remain nothing other than an artifact of posthumanist discussions. Likewise, arguments will be put forth to why Haldane’s Daedalus figure is a pertinent analogy, and why the Camusian Myth of Sisyphus is a suitable narrative to appropriate for posthumanist analyses.

### ***2.3 Mythological Analysis***

In this part, we will first explore how to relate Prometheus with our human condition by analysing the analogies’ relevance. Then we will understand how it deals with the humanist tradition at large.

It is undeniable that some analogies permit the comparison of the promethean myth with posthumanism.

An initial symmetry is the concept of humans *as makers* or artisans; i.e., humans as entities employing techniques to shape its environment. Prometheus also has the appearance of a creator: he made humans. He made humans by fire, by the first artifact leading to a technical mode. He does not change humanity strictly speaking if he made it to become what it is. We could say of Prometheus that he almost created humans by giving them a root – the fire. From there, humans become themselves, pursuing themselves. That is to say, becomes human. Prometheus, by giving the fire, created humans because of their primary maladjustment to the world. It is “his significant genetic trait” (Leroi-Gourhan, 1965: 48). At birth, humans have no claws, fur or shell to protect themselves; they does not know how to walk per se. Prometheus brings fire to humanity specifically for the reason that humankind does not possess a specific quality of its own. Consequently, humankind is the one who builds itself because it originally has nothing. In this analogy, Prometheus creates humanity like technology makes humanity what it is: a maker.

Secondly, in this mythology, the maker is guilty of the ancient Greek concept of hubris, and is confined to the punishment of Prometheus. By opposing the figure of Orpheus to that of Prometheus, Hadot describes humanity's Promethean temptation to use violence against nature to reveal its secrets (Hadot, 2004). However, it is Günther Anders' (1956) idea of “Promethean shame” of being oneself that is popularized worldwide. This concept expresses the notion of humankind's weakness, confronted with his biological limits, while at the same time comparing himself to the perfection of power embodied in the machine, of which he is nevertheless the designer. The imitation of machines would be a consequence of the dissatisfaction resulting from the comparison between the human state and a preferable state, thus referring to the Promethean desire to possess fire.

We can begin to see that the Promethean position (or posture) is two-sided. It is first linked to a creative posture, a demiurgic one, and secondly to an existential one, which is torn between its capacities and the world's resistance, that is to say an absurd one. If we are to find philosophical roots in mythological figures, it will be a necessity to keep those two sides in mind and to find equivalent positions.

Nevertheless, this very posture leads to the first flaw which makes the Promethean symbolism inappropriate. This lack of accuracy rests entirely on the myth, but is rooted in the part that specifically explains the resort to Prometheus and, thus, invalidates it. It is the underlying desire for penance that underlies the Prometheus myth.

Referring to Prometheus is a call to humility and abandonment both of this desire for violence against nature and of the shame associated with humankind's current state. Prometheus is a moral objection because his hubris was punished. Hence, for technophobic critics mostly, it is the idea of punishment – therefore the importance of humility – that runs through Prometheus' critical affiliation with posthumanist thought.

The analogy here crumbles. Prometheus is not human, he's a Titan. Prometheus did not want the fire for himself, but he was the one who was punished. Therefore, it was the intermediary who was punished by the gods – and not the culprit in the broad sense, that is, humans who needed fire to exist. In the symbolist framework, it is up to the donor to be punished (gods), not to the recipient of the gift (humankind). Prometheus has been overtaken.

Nevertheless, those analogical explanations could not completely explain the apparent success of Prometheus' myth.

#### **2.4 Promethean Technophilia**

Indeed, there is an undeniable, even implicit, use of Prometheus in most technophile literature, much of which appears to have overly spiritual sentiments despite its proponents' claims to be rooted deeply in purely scientific and technological advancements. In an interview Google Director of Engineering Ray Kurzweil stated that:

*We'll have nanobots, blood cell-sized devices that have powerful computers in them, and communication devices, and it will all be on a wireless (unintelligible) network, it'll be on the Internet. And we can have billions of them in our brain ... We'll be able to send them in without surgery, and not just to one spot in the brain, but to billions of locations, and have them interact with our biological neurons and really evolve into a hybrid of biological and non-biological intelligence by the late 2020s (Kurzweil, 2006).*

Thus, Kurzweil is drawing on the use of nanotechnology to augment our biological bodies to create a sort of "hybrid", an in-between. In doing so, he sees the use of such advanced technologies as natural, as part of the necessary evolutionary pathways that we as a species find ourselves.

Similar thoughts can be seen in K. Eric Drexler's *Engines of Creation 2.0* (2006) which was the first full length exposition of the benefits and costs of molecular manufacturing. This means of production can create objects by arranging the atoms one-by-one, thus strictly controlling the

byproducts of production as well as the tolerances of the final product (Drexler, 2006). As a result, molecular manufacturing can usher in an age of what Drexler calls 'radical abundance', thus changing the basic conceptions of economics and ultimately the mode of being in which humanity understands itself (Drexler, 2013).

Like the promethean gifts, molecular manufacturing can radically shift the definition of being away from traditional humanist notions towards something similar to that of the posthumanist post-human, in the same way that posthumanism interprets the promethean myth to signify. However, like Kurzweil, Drexler falls into the anthropocentric pit, seeing the radical new technology as solely a means by which humanity, as it is understood in the humanist sense, can better itself. The evolving technology leads itself to this near inevitable end. As humanity has always done, the manipulations of basic matter into tools for use continues, but only with more advanced materials and tools. The emphasis is not necessarily on the new way humanity must redefine its being-in-the-world (Dreyfus, 1991; Heidegger, 1962: 12, 84; Wheeler, 2011), but rather how humanity can continue being what it is but with a technological shift that may prove to be far too dramatic for traditional humanistic definitions to remain.

Nonetheless, this bias of appropriation of the promethean myth puts far less, if any, emphasis on the dialectic of anti-humanist dichotomy, with greater focus on the actions of Prometheus by bringing humans the means by which they can better themselves, changing themselves willingly through the adoption of novel technologies.

In such cases we can see how the lines begins to blur as the sharp distinctions of the classical humanist dichotomies begin to dissolve. The distinction between humanity/machine begins to fade as gradation becomes the norm and demarcation becomes grey (Shakespeare, 2012; Jones & Whitaker, 2012). Like Prometheus' use of fire and tools to bring humankind a new mode of being, these technologies are seen by transhumanist thinkers as the means by which the human individual can become the technological post-human. However, the anthropomorphic focus on enhancement, is unmistakably humanist, greatly diverging from the anti-humanist sentiment that characterizes posthumanist thought.

The promethean myth could thus be fitting for a position focusing on the human in traditional humanist frameworks. One which acknowledge the inevitable greying of dichotomies, simultaneously emphasizing these distinctions. Some transhumanists praise the human-centered control over her domain, seeking the means by which to harness technology in order to improve and enhance her nature (Sandel, 2009). Like in the myth of

Prometheus, they sometimes accept the means of enhancement with an understanding that such enhancements are integrally linked to humanist dichotomies, “the (human) subject manipulates the object; science takes control over nature; the mind engineers the body - which is nothing but an instrument” (Franssen, 2014: 79).

It becomes then a necessity to understand new forms of myths, more suited to express the posthumanist perspective.

### **3. Daedalus, Demiurge and Technè: The creator posture.**

Not all posthumanists agree on the necessity of using technique towards the goal of self-improvement. This is a major difference with transhumanism, as all transhumanists are open to a technophilic perspective. Therefore, the crafting of techniques is for some posthumanists a Trojan horse too and we cannot diminish this to omit the importance of technicity in posthumanist mythology. This is part of the Prometheus myth and we need to include it in our analysis.

As already mentioned, there is a critical importance in the maker analogy of humankind creating itself viz. Prometheus’ fire and by technique. In our current situation, we can focus on the treatment of Roco, Bainbridge, Tonn, and Whitesides’ NBIC Report (2013), in which, according to Jean-Michel Besnier, the authors “*prophesy* above all the so-called integral thought[...] and the transformation of humanity.” (Besnier, 2016). Thus, they carry out an “updating of the cosmogonic myth [where] man becomes an architect,[...] demiurge.” (Chifflet, 2009: 63-74).

The notion of demiurge goes along with the creative, artisanal posture. In the 20th century, Haldane announced the future advances in genetics and demonstrated that they would be considered indecent and unnatural, while echoing the myth of Daedalus. Daedalus was an Athenian craftsman and an artist, whose myth is famous for the creation of the Labyrinth on Crete on one hand, and the crafting of wings for himself and his son Icarus, on the other hand. Haldane saw him as one of the first men to pursue his experiments by neglecting the gods and being generally forgotten by them (Haldane, 1923).

*Daedalus, on the other hand, seems to master the techniques he develops, without worrying about the gods or morals, and he is the one who, for Haldane, best represents the human adventure of the mastery of nature through science and technology. [...] Daedalus' technical skill does not lead to any punishment, even if it produces horrors and is part of a mad sequence of human (royal) and divine*



*passions. This is why he represents for Haldane the first modern man in that he does not care about the gods and his technique is amoral* (Atlan, 2005).

Daedalus is the maker who knows how to use the technique even if he cannot predict where it will lead him. As soon as a problem is raised, Daedalus is the intermediary of its resolution, resulting in a new problem to be solved. The beef cow designed for Pasiphae, having given birth to the Minotaur, to whom it was necessary to build a maze prison, to get out of which Daedalus had to create wings.

*It is proper, for Haldane, of all biological inventions since the earliest times, to appear as a perversion before being later accepted and even transformed into a social ritual, being the subject of beliefs and prejudices that are never again called into question* (Atlan, 2005).

Daedalus creations are not bad in essence; but they can escape him in their consequences, necessarily unforeseeable on the long run.

Another interesting analogy between the current use of technics and Daedalus myth is that the evil consequences of his creations rests mostly in the fact of using the technics in the service of the mighty only (Pasiphae, the king Minos...), which echoes some of our current socio-political fears.

In regards to punishment, then, it is not Daedalus who is punished, except by the death of his son. We don't know anything about his feelings about it. Haldane even advances: "Even the death of Icarus must have had little weight for a man who had already been banished from Athens for the murder of his nephew." (Haldane, 1923).

It is hubris that killed Icarus, not a flaw in the technique. "He [Daedalus] disappears from mythology, after Icarus, the first victim of technological hubris, having wanted to fly too high and having approached the Sun, saw the glue of his wings melt[...]" (Atlan, 2005). Daedalus knew and told him not to fly near the sun for the glue of the wings could dissolve. This myth tells us that it is the inconsiderate use of technique that is negative: contrary to that, in Prometheus myth, the technique is bad in its essence, per se, because the simple act of allowing the fire is punished. For Daedalus, punishment is not in the technique, fundamentally, nor in the fact of possessing or obtaining it.

Therefore, the maker and user Daedalus is directly ignored by the gods, and appears in no relation to a transgression of the nature. He thus moves away from the media-friendly figure of Prometheus, who reduces and

diverts the concept that it is supposed to evoke. As a designer, he is open to the possible, open to its *impact* on the future in his creative effervescence.

At the same time, in exploring these questions of design, use, and punishment, we consequentially approach an existential precipice as well. The existential figure of Sisyphus, entirely held in his condition, completely contained in the act of rolling the rock as a divine punishment, can now be explored.

### ***3.1 Sisyphus Lifts Prometheus: The Existential Posture***

It cannot be denied that there exists an importance of the promethean myth to posthumanism, one that stems from the genealogy of posthumanism. However, we contend that although such a genealogical account cannot be denied, the continued appropriation of the analogy of Prometheus to that of posthumanist culture fails to address many of the embedded humanist dichotomies that are present in the promethean myths. In an attempt to preserve the importance of narrative in posthumanism, we thus propose that a new, more fitting myth be adopted by posthumanist theorists, that of the Camusian Sisyphus. In order to argue why the Camusian myth is better suited, and given this is the first time the Sisyphian myth is being discussed with this intent in context of the posthumanism discourse, we will recount the myth in its original form as well as Camus' account. We will show how his interpretation is strongly representative of the posthumanism position (although he does not position himself as a posthumanist) by emphasizing the lack of conventional humanist dichotomies thus showing how Sisyphus represents the ideal posthuman transformation as well as how Sisyphus comes to show the importance of what we have come to know as the artifact of being, a concept that should take precedent in posthumanism discourses.

Readers should also take note on the hermeneutic investigation that is to follow. The existence of posthumanism as a discourse followed Camus' death. As such, it would be highly anachronistic to attribute his philosophy or even the Myth of Sisyphus to being specifically posthumanist. In fact, scholars argue that Camus' work is thoroughly humanist in nature (Decker, 2010; Wadlow, 2013). However, Von Hassel (2017) argues that Camus' conception of theoretical rebellion – of which this paper levies – leads Camus to assert a 'new humanism' of "solidarity and freedom". As such, this 'new humanism' – although still thoroughly humanist in the traditional sense in Van Hassel's paper – can be interpreted as being distinctively posthumanist in nature. The remainder of this paper aims to do just that.

### ***3.2 The Myth of Sisyphus***

The historical record of the myth of Sisyphus is no less diverse than that of the Promethean myth. Various authors of antiquity make use of the narrative, either in their works of art or literature (Apollodorus, 1921; Homer, 1900; Müller, 1841; Pausanias, 1918; Theognis, 1931). The Camusian interpretation itself is mostly metaphorical rather than a sincere historical account of the myth as such, however the aim of this paper is not necessarily to derive a hermeneutics from a sincere 'historical' account of Sisyphus (there are many), but to focus primary on the Camusian myth as such - for a in-depth discussion of the historical and metaphorical interpretation by Camus, see Collard (2002). The general story, pieced together here by both Homer and Apollodorus, is as follows:

Sisyphus, first king of Corinth, was known as perhaps the craftiest of all monarchs. Also regarded as a tyrant who took great pleasure in killing people protected under the custom of *xenia* - the Greek custom of protecting foreign visitors - which was considered sacred and under the protection of Zeus. Ultimately, on account of his contempt of divine law and hubris, believing himself to be above the gods, he was condemned to eternal punishment; forced to carry a boulder up a hill, only to have it fall down to the roots upon reaching the precipice (Apollodorus, 1921; Homer, 1900). The punishment was intended to torture Sisyphus by forcing him into an eternity of meaninglessness (Camus, 1942).

The myth, being hermeneutically diverse, lacks a specificity in many of the authors' works that is pertinent to a posthumanist hermeneutics of the Sisyphian myth. Classical interpretations suggest that his punishments were the result of his attainment of immortality by chaining Zeus' hitman Thanatos (i.e., death). Through his wit in entrapping death, the universes divine laws instituted by the gods - in this case the ability to die (the dichotomy of life/death) - ceased to function. As such, the dead, diseased and mangled could walk the earth anew, and Sisyphus freed himself from the Gods.<sup>2</sup> Although, we can judiciously suggest an interpretation that shifts the punishment of attaining immortality (a distinguishing quality of the god/human distinction) towards one of a refusal to die. Theognis suggests this specifically, that it was not immortality for which Sisyphus was punished, but the refusal to die, the suspension of the life/death and infinite/finite dynamics of natural law of the heaven/earth dichotomy.

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<sup>2</sup> Theognis 1931, see in particular 699-718; Pherecydes, FGrH 3 F 119 (Müller, 1841).

### **3.3 The Absurd Hero**

The Camusian interpretation of the story is unique. Camus considers Sisyphus to be what he calls the 'absurd hero'. The absurd hero is one who rejects suicide, both in its physical (literally killing oneself) and metaphysical manifestations (adopting religious faith), and acknowledges the objective meaninglessness of existence yet rebels against the apparent futility and creates their own meaning. Camus analyzes the psychology, the thought processes of Sisyphus as he engages in his endless task saying:

*It is during that return, that pause, that Sisyphus interests me. A face that toils so close to stones is already stone itself! I see that man going back down with a heavy yet measured step toward the torment of which he will never know the end. That hour like a breathing- space which returns as surely as his suffering, that is the hour of consciousness. At each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks toward the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock (Camus, 1942: 121).*

Camus argues that the most tortuous moment for Sisyphus is when he becomes truly conscious of his eternal fate, yet Camus argues that even when this consciousness of Sisyphus' absurd condition emerges, a conscious rebellion can be cultivated that can ultimately aid him in combatting his condition saying that "there is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn" (Camus, 1942: 121), this is what we call the will to transcend, to synthesize meaning from nothingness and to redefine one's mode of being into something that cannot, at that time, be recognized. Yet, this cannot emerge de nihilo, rather, the will is the product of his consciousness, the self-understanding of his condition.

Hence, even in the path of an absurd condition, the absurd hero continues on nonetheless. It is the consciousness itself, the realization that life is a priori meaningless that frees Sisyphus from the bonds set upon him by the gods. His acceptance to his fate allows him to move beyond its limits, to transcend it and thus redefine himself entirely, thus Camus concludes of Sisyphus that:

*I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each*

*mineral flake of that night filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy* (Camus, 1942: 123).

Sisyphus (and thus all humankind), likewise Sisyphus understands himself in relation to the gods that define him, and thus he defines himself in like manner. They sought to punish Sisyphus with the most tormentous task imaginable for his belief that he was above his certain mode of being i.e., human. However, it is through this very punishment itself that Sisyphus' will to transcend emerges that permits him to erase that humanist dichotomy, to remove its importance by devaluing one of its disjuncts i.e., gods in their relation to humanity. In doing so Sisyphus literally "negates the gods" and this likewise makes Sisyphus something more than just a human or a god, something that cannot be obviously demarcated.

### ***3.4 Finding Humankind's Condition in the Myth***

The Sisyphean myth is an analogical way of applying a symbolical figure on humankind's current conditions. Indeed, Sisyphus could see no worse pain than not finishing his never-ending task and being totally aware of his condition and its flaws. "They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labour." (Camus, 1942: 119). The same goes for humans who see no end to their labour and immersion in daily worries.

Nevertheless, this condition is no excuse to end or cover the future. Camus' Sisyphus is the embodiment of optimistic qualities, optimism often being a qualifying term for both transhumanism and posthumanism (mostly meant as a tragic criticism). Sisyphus' optimism confronts the abandonment to death and is fiercely in favour of life, without having any real relationship to an omnipotent entity, like gods or nature: "He (Sisyphus) is, as much through his passions as through his torture. His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted towards accomplishing nothing." (Camus, 1942: 120). In this analysis, humankind is underlined by its ability to move straight forward, to animate itself. This constant activity is impossible to stop (rolling the rock, going forward with the technique), although how aware we could be of the possible failure. The optimism of which posthumanism is accused of leads to the figure of a happy Sisyphus:

*The absurd man says yes and his effort will henceforth be unceasing. If there is a personal fate, there is no higher destiny or at least there is but one which he concludes is inevitable and despicable. For the rest, he knows himself to be the master of his days* (Camus, 1942: 123).

In that analogy, Sisyphus embodies humankind as it is open to its relationship to the future, to its *vision* of the future. He is sincere in his attitude, honest: which is at the root of posthumanism when it seeks to remain totally faithful to his vision of humankind. A vision, as was said, which is not necessarily the essentialist, humanist one; but the outlook on humankind trying to improve, to move forward. In Camus' description of Sisyphus, the word fidelity itself is used:

*Thus, convinced of the wholly human origin of all that is human, a blind man eager to see who knows that the night has no end, he is still on the go. [...] But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks* (Camus, 1942: 123).

This perspective introduces us to the idea of authenticity, at the root of the major analysis underlying posthumanism and transhumanism, that is the necessity, the yearning, and the duty to improve oneself.

### **3.5 The Artifacts of Being**

Posthumanism focuses heavily on the entire shift away from any humanist definitions and the dualist anthropocentric traditions that have persisted in western culture since Plato onwards. Yet some posthumanists acknowledge the existent agents that are the subjects of such transition even given their rejection of the subject/object dichotomy (Law & Mol, 1995; Mol, 2002)<sup>3</sup>. In doing so they make a philosophical error of ignoring the being of the agents that become redefined. There is something unique about the individual or the population that changes, this uniqueness is preserved, at least in some degree, within the novel mode of being, regardless of the mode. This uniqueness is what we call the artifact of being ('artifact' is employed here with a meaning of 'residuality' or 'what remains' rather than 'artificiality'). This artifact of being we contend to be the conscious rebellion

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<sup>3</sup> Graham Harman (2016) categorized Annemarie Mol and John Law's ontological program as succinctly falling within the camp of New Materialism. New Materialism, although not the posthumanism of Hassan, nonetheless is one of the at least seven ways of defining posthumanism.

against the absurdity of existence; meaning the rebellious awakening of consciousness that combats the absurd and seeks to transcend the current mode of being i.e., the will to transcend. This artifact remains beyond the threshold of redefinition into the novel mode of being, i.e., the posthumanist post-human. Sisyphus is an exemplar of this. It is the conscious awakening of his predicament that could lead him to despair - as the gods intended with their punishment - or, as Camus contends, can lead to an acknowledgment of absurdity and thus rebellion against it. This rebellion persists with Sisyphus for eternity, it is preserved and serves as a foundational part of his posthumanist post-human identity even given its artifice status.

In sum, in all posthumanist definitions of an agent (for those that provide one), there must exist an acknowledgment of the artifact of being which persists. As in the case with the humanist definitions of human, this artifact is that which is central to its existence, the rebellious consciousness as it emerges when conscious of absurd existence. A liberation from humanist concepts of human 'imposed' by the gods, accomplished by self-redefinition through rebellion. The artifact of the previous self, the dichotomous self of the mind/body, becomes meaningless insofar as they are no longer emphasized, instead, the artifact of being is essential to posthumanism, it is the seed that is kept, but built upon and serves as the principal catalyst for his redefinition into a posthumanist post-human status of being. It is the consciousness that is itself the will to transcend, but only when changed through willful rebellion. Sisyphus, is paradigmatic of this transcendence. Through his rebellion against the gods, the dichotomies of mind/body, animate/inanimate and human/earth are dissolved. The rebellious will to transcend must first be present, once cultivated but the individual changes the subject into something beyond the subject/object distinction. Sisyphus, as Camus sees him, becomes something utterly unrecognizable to his creators, to the gods, he is utterly happy, he is post-human (in the sense that early posthumanism conceives of).

#### **4. Myth as Representation**

This paper has thus far aimed to accomplish the following goals: (1) to introduce the necessity of a mythological revision of posthumanism (2) to show how the myth of Prometheus exists as a narrative but not flawless analogy for posthumanism, (3) to understand how Haldane's Daedalus interpretation could be an ideal portrait of the technical maker when linked to posthumanism, and finally (4) to both introduce and argue why the

Camusian Sisyphus acts as a more suitable analogy on the existential standpoint. This section, and the remainder of this paper aims to extend beyond arguments of both genealogy and suitability, instead offering interpretive accounts of how the Camusian Sisyphus represents posthumanist debates regarding ecological impacts.

#### **4.1 One with His Rock**

Much of posthumanism's contention regarding the displacement of the 'human' from the superior humanist pedestal is a consequence of its realization that there must be an inclusive account of phenomenal experience that goes beyond solely that of humans. Thus, posthumanists shift their understanding of how humans encounter and experience the world in an attempt to include how other beings do so. Hence, one ought not to understand the posthumanist position as an exclusion of the human-world encounter, but instead a diversification of world-views that includes the human as an unprivileged, but equal member.

By a similar token, posthumanism accounts for the heterogeneous phenomenologies that exist in the uniquely human-world encounter. The differing social, cultural, ethnic and economic experiences that characterize and influence certain human experiences are accounted, just as they are in humanist thought. However, many posthumanists adopt an object-oriented ontology (OOO) that extends beyond this human-centered inclusion of variation to include that for all beings and their unique degree of phenomenological experience of their existence and position in it (Harman, 2002; Morton, 2007, 2013). By a similar token, Timothy Morton (2012; 2016) and his theory of *dark ecology* and the related concept of the 'mesh' provide the basis on which the Camusian Sisyphus idealizes the OOO of posthumanist thought. The initial Sisyphean disconnect between *the human* and *the rock* exemplifies a clear symmetry with Morton's contention of ecological literature regarding the need for a convergence of an understanding between human and nature saying that:

*Ecological writing keeps insisting that we are "embedded" in nature. Nature is a surrounding medium that sustains our being. Due to the properties of the rhetoric that evokes the idea of a surrounding medium, ecological writing can never properly establish that this is nature and thus provide a compelling and consistent aesthetic basis for the new worldview that is meant to change society. It is a small operation, like tipping over a domino...Putting something called Nature on a pedestal and admiring it from afar does for the environment what patriarchy does*



*for the figure of Woman. It is a paradoxical act of sadistic admiration* (Morton, 2007: 4-5).

Camus similarly illustrates this bifurcation between nature and Sisyphus saying:

*[...] one sees merely the whole effort of a body straining to raise the huge stone, to roll it, and push it up a slope a hundred times over; one sees the face screwed up, the cheek tight against the stone, the shoulder bracing the clay-covered mass, the foot wedging it, the fresh start with arms outstretched, the wholly human security of two earth-clotted hands. At the very end of his long effort measured by skyless space and time without depth, the purpose is achieved. Then Sisyphus watches the stone rush down in a few moments toward lower world whence he will have to push it up again toward the summit. He goes back down to the plain* (Camus, 1942: 120-121).

The account clearly separates the world that Sisyphus finds himself in as something wholly separate, external, and in this case, in opposition to his being. If we take this part of the Sisyphian myth as the part of sole import, then Sisyphus is nothing other than a humanist icon whose existence is in contrast to the world; gods, the mountain and the stone are unique phenomenologies that are at best unimportant and not considered, or at worst nonexistent to him. However, the once inanimate and unimportant facets of the world around him come alive and position themselves as fundamental parts to him, and him to them. Sisyphus' conscious awakening, his will to transcend allows him to understand his interconnectedness with his world- encounter, he is happy with his rock. He does not seek to understand the stone, its compositions, he does not overcome it with tools, but rather he goes through a self-transcendence beyond the rock, but in doing so becomes closer to it, "His rock is a thing" which enables him to "silence all the idols" and permit "the myriad wondering little voices of the earth rise up," not just those of privileged humanity (Camus, 1942: 123).

This newfound connection with his new world, his rock and that mountain is what makes Sisyphus posthuman rather than simply post-human. He engages and gains a new understanding of his being-in-the-world as the interconnectedness of humanity and nature are made manifest. Morton (2012) describes this phenomenon as the 'mesh' stating that:

*All life forms are the mesh, and so are all the dead ones, as are their habitats, which are also made up of living and nonliving beings. We know even more now about how life forms have shaped Earth (think of oil, of oxygen—the first climate change cataclysm). We drive around using crushed dinosaur parts. Iron is mostly a by-product of bacterial metabolism. So is oxygen. Mountains can be made of shells and fossilized bacteria. Death and the mesh go together in another sense, too, because natural selection implies extinction. (Morton, 2012: 29)*

Both death and life according to the concept of the mesh are inexorably linked to one another, each influencing and augmenting the other. Sisyphus, by a similar token:

*[...] returning toward his rock, in that slight pivoting he contemplates that series of unrelated actions which become his fate, created by him, combined under his memory's eye and soon sealed by his death. Thus, convinced of the wholly human origin of all that is human, a blind man eager to see who knows that the night has no end, he is still on the go. The rock is still rolling. (Camus, 1942: 123)*

Sisyphus, in his realization that the concept of 'human' and all associated notions of uniqueness and consequential superiority over all other modes is nothing other than a human construct and not the result of any cosmological or evolutionary necessity. It is upon this insight, when Sisyphus contextualizes the various modes of being, that he is able to both appreciate and truly see the authentic mesh of interconnectedness and pluralization of various phenomenologies. And he understands for the first time not only his being-in-the-world, but that "Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night filled mountain, in itself forms a world" and that he is neither superior nor inferior to that world, but a part of a plurality of modes of structuring the world (Camus, 1942: 123).

The primary dichotomies that are most presently dissolved in the Sisyphean myth here are those of god/human and heaven/earth. It is the responsibility of potential future research projects to determine to further, if possible, levy the myth of Sisyphus as a narrative tool to erase all the traditional humanist dichotomies and show how the Sisyphean myth is indeed a more suitable inflective narrative for posthumanism.

## 5. Conclusion

The promethean myth has served an important narrative role in both transhumanism and posthumanism philosophies. However, we have attempted to show that, in fact, the myth does not accurately represent both discourses in the way their proponents intend. The inherent dualism and anthropocentricity of some of the transhumanist theory makes the similar dualistic promethean myth suitable as an explanatory narrative. In this regards, therefore, we understand two major contradictions in this myth. Whereas transhumanism main line is the use of technics, Prometheus is neither a real artisan nor an artist. He does not create the fire, but gives it to men who create themselves in this way. Secondly, Prometheus is never in the position to exist, in a human existential way: he is a Titan, condemned to immortality. We cannot relate to his torment, his stupor, or his punishment.

Therefore, the anti-dualistic, impartial and transcendent discussions that are distinctive of posthumanism do not make the dualistic promethean myth appropriate as an analogy despite its historical importance to posthumanism.

Nevertheless, it seems obvious that posthumanism makes it possible “to designate a vague set of tendencies that come under a new Great Story endowed with a rich speculative and concrete imagination, capable of integrating scientific revolutions, including the Darwinian revolution, and carrying an infinite hope.” (Hottos, 2017: 127). Thus, in order to preserve the importance of explanatory narratives to posthumanism and to sustain future posthumanist discourses, we proposed Haldane’s Daedalus explanation to fit the technical *impact* of humankind in the world as the being needing to shape its entire environment and itself. Then, we showed that the Camusian Myth of Sisyphus offers a representative inflective narrative that can illustrate the posthumanist *vision* of humankind’s existential condition. In doing so, we showed that a particular version of the Sisyphian myth was free from the anthropocentric and dualistic incompatibilities found in the Promethean myth. Additionally, we showed that not only is Sisyphus the ideal representation of the posthumanist post-human, but that with closer observation of Camus’ interpretation it is obvious that a better understanding of posthumanism as whole can be inferred. Concepts such as the will to transcend and the importance of the artifacts of being were introduced as well as their importance to further discussions of posthumanism. Ultimately, more work is required to tease out the particularities of the Sisyphian myth and its applicability as a posthumanist

narrative. The length restrictions of an article of this form limit the lengths to which this demonstration can take place. As such, further research is required to determine the continued suitability of the Sisyphean myth to dialogues of these domains, however, it is my position that Sisyphus, in relation to the promethean myth, offers a more suitable narrative foundation for posthumanism.

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## Biodata

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